

## Press release – MEPs warn of attempts by some EU countries to silence and subdue critical media



In a resolution adopted on Tuesday by 52 votes to 5 and 7 abstentions, the committee condemns “attempts by governments of some member states to silence critical and independent media”. MEPs denounce underhand efforts to restrict media freedom and pluralism via financial patronage. The text pays special attention to public service media, which should rely on financial models that assure their editorial independence.

### **Journalists need to be protected, by law and in practice**

MEPs point to the “growing pattern of intimidation”, citing the murders of Daphne Caruana Galizia and Ján Kuciak and his fiancée as examples of the risks that confront investigative journalists. They call on public figures to refrain from denigrating journalists, and insist on the obligation to investigate attacks, highlighting that female journalists are especially vulnerable and should be given additional protection.

### **EU money for media freedom and pluralism**

The text notes that excessive concentration of media ownership puts pluralism at risk, making it more difficult to challenge the spread of disinformation. MEPs demand that EU countries take action to avoid horizontal concentration and guarantee transparency. They criticise governments’ excessive interference in public advertising, and make clear that EU money must not be spent on government-controlled media or political propaganda.

The committee asks the European Commission to assess ownership transparency, as well as private and government interference, in each member state. In the context of the negotiations over the EU long-term budget, it also appeals for

increased funds for independent journalism.

### **Online hate speech and disinformation**

MEPs ask for the legal framework to be fortified in order to fight increasing online hate speech and call for greater collaboration between online platforms and law enforcement. They assert that platforms' voluntary actions are "necessary yet still insufficient" in tackling disinformation, illegal content and foreign interference, but stress that they "must not become private censors".

MEPs are particularly worried about third party democratic interference and highlight attempts to undermine citizens' trust in democratic institutions, notably through "conspiracy theories and public disinformation campaigns aimed at discrediting the EU". They add that such campaigns have been evident during the pandemic.

### **Quote**

[Magdalena Adamowicz \(EPP, PL\)](#), rapporteur, stated: "Disinformation, hate speech and the politicisation and capture of public media by ruling parties are the greatest threats to democracy, the rule of law, and the existence of the European Union today. We are at a turning point. If we do not stand up to defend free and independent media, fight disinformation and hate speech, and support a resilient and critical civil society, we will lose our right and our ability to make free and democratic choices".

### **Next steps**

The draft resolution will be put to the vote by the full House during the next plenary session (23-26 November).

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## **[Press release – EU agri-food products to be protected in China](#)**



In a resolution approved by 38 votes, with one vote against and three abstentions, the Trade Committee backed the EU's agreement with China, [signed](#) in September 2020. It will ensure that [one hundred European products](#) bearing Geographical Indications (GIs) such as Cava, Feta, Münchener Bier, Polska Wódka, Prosciutto di Parma and Queso Manchego will be protected against imitations and misuse of a product's name. In exchange, one [hundred Chinese products](#) will enjoy the same type of protection in the EU.

Within four years, the agreement will be extended to include a further 175 European and Chinese products.

While trade MEPs welcomed the agreement they see primarily as a confidence-booster, they call on China to extend the constructive cooperation to the ongoing negotiations on a [bilateral investment agreement](#), as well as into areas of conflict such as on industrial subsidies, state-owned enterprises, forced technology transfer, reciprocity in public procurement and overcapacity in steel, aluminium and high-tech.

**Rapporteur [Iuliu Winkler](#) (EPP, RO), said:**

"The EU-China Agreement on the protection of GIs is a positive step forward in the bilateral relationship and a good tool to promote and protect the authenticity of high-quality products on our respective markets. It is primarily a confidence-building exercise, serving as a measurement of the parties' ambition to ensure the deal is implemented effectively. The trade committee will actively participate in monitoring and scrutinising the agreement's effective implementation, seeking frequent reporting from the

European Commission.”

### Next steps

Parliament is set to vote on its consent to the agreement and the accompanying resolution at its first November session (11-12 November). With Parliament’s consent, the Council has to adopt the agreement so that it can enter into force at the beginning of 2021.

### Background

In 2019, China was the third largest destination for EU agri-food products worth [€14.5 billion](#). It is also the second largest destination for EU exports of GI products, accounting for 9% in value, including wines, spirit drinks, and agri-food products. In 2018 and 2019 however, 80% of seizures of counterfeit and pirated goods originated in China, causing €60 billion loss to EU suppliers, says the report.

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## EESC elects Group presidents for new term of office



The new Group presidents have been elected following the vote held on the first day of the inaugural plenary session of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and will serve for the 2020-2023 period of the coming term of office.

Three new presidents of the EESC Groups were elected on the first day of the EESC’s “Inaugural plenary session – EESC term of office 2020-2025”, 27 October 2020.

The new Group presidents are:

- Employers Group (Group I): **Stefano Mallia** (MT)
- Workers Group (Group II): **Oliver Röpke** (AT)
- Diversity Europe Group (Group III): **Séamus Boland** (IE)

The Group presidents will remain in office for the next two and a half years until 2023. The vote took place during the respective Groups’ constitutive meetings.

For further information, please click on the following links:

### Employers’ Group

[Stefano Mallia takes over as President of the EESC Employers' Group](#)

#### **Workers' Group**

[Oliver Röpke will continue as Workers' Group President during the new EESC mandate](#)

#### **Diversity Europe Group**

[Séamus Boland from Ireland is the new President of the EESC Diversity Europe Group](#)

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## **[Press release – European values: COVID-19 emergency measures pose a “risk of abuse of power”](#)**



On Tuesday, the Civil Liberties Committee approved a draft resolution that takes stock of the state of European values in the context of national measures taken to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, with 50 votes to 11 and 3 abstentions.

MEPs concluded that national emergency measures pose a “risk of abuse of power” and stressed that any measure affecting [democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental rights](#) must be necessary, proportional and time-limited. They call on governments to consider terminating their “state of emergency” or at least to clearly define the delegation of powers to their executives, and to ensure that appropriate parliamentary and judicial checks and balances are in place.

MEPs urge the Commission to conduct an evaluation of “first wave” measures, in addition to the initial comments included in its [first annual rule of law report](#), and emphasise the need for a permanent, [effective monitoring mechanism](#).

## **Personal freedoms**

EU countries have to “exercise utmost restraint” when restricting the freedom of movement (especially in relation to the right to family life), while the Commission should scrutinise the application of Schengen rules.

MEPs warn against undue restrictions to the freedom of assembly and changes in legislation while citizens are unable to protest. In this context, the need to guarantee free and fair elections becomes even more important, especially with regards to implementing changes to electoral legislation, ensuring equal rights in campaigning, and alternative forms of voting.

## **Disinformation and media freedom**

Disinformation threatens citizens’ health and their trust in public institutions, and has also been used as a pretext to restrict freedom of expression. The best way to tackle this, MEPs say, is by supporting independent journalism and media pluralism (including through transparent allocation of funds to media) as well as by improving journalists’ working conditions.

## **Right to education and protection of vulnerable groups**

Member states should guarantee the right to education by ensuring that classes continue and students have access to them. Furthermore, they should find solutions through technology or judicial cooperation to safeguard the rights of defendants, and to protect the rights of all persons in their prisons.

MEPs finally warn that disinformation stigmatises migrants and has increased discrimination, racism, xenophobia, and hate speech against persons with disabilities, asylum seekers and refugees, people of Romani heritage and LGBTI+ persons.

## **Quote**

The rapporteur [Juan Fernando López Aguilar](#) (S&D, ES), commented that “the member states have adopted a vast number of emergency measures, at different times and with different impacts on the right to healthcare, to privacy and data protection, to equality before the law, to non-discrimination or freedom of expression and information. The piecemeal approach has produced an EU patchwork in uncharted territory. Our message is that even in times of crisis, there is no room for trade-offs when it comes democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law”.

## **Next steps**

Parliament is scheduled to vote on this resolution during the 11-13 November



plenary session.

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## ESMA adds UK venues to opinions on third-country trading venues

The European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA), the EU's securities markets regulator, has updated the list of third-country venues (TCTV) in the context of the opinions on post-trade transparency and position limits under MiFID II and MiFIR.

Following the publication of a [Statement](#) on the impact of Brexit on the application of MiFID II/MiFIR on 1 October 2020, ESMA proceeded with the assessment of UK venues against the criteria of the opinions related to the transparency and the position limits provisions.

The UK venues have received a positive assessment and have been added to:

Consequently, from 1 January 2021:

- EU investment firms will not be required to make transactions public in the EU via an EU APA if they are executed on one of the UK trading venues of the transparency list; and
- Commodity derivative contracts traded on UK trading venues on the position limits list will not be considered as economically equivalent over-the-counter (EEOTC) contracts for the EU position limit regime.

ESMA has also updated the related [guidance](#) to take into account feedback received from market participants on the identification of bonds and U.S Treasuries, as well as on the treatment of venues without a market identifier code (MIC). To provide enough time to market participants to implement the changes to the guidance, the date of application of the transparency list is set on 10 November 2020.

The relevant links related to the opinions and their annexes are available on a dedicated [webpage](#).